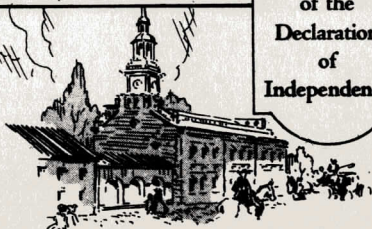


JOHN
HANCOCK
WAS
THE FIRST TO
SIGN THE
DECLARATION
OF
INDEPENDENCE

Framing the **DECLARATION of
INDEPENDENCE**



The Signing
of the
Declaration
of
Independence



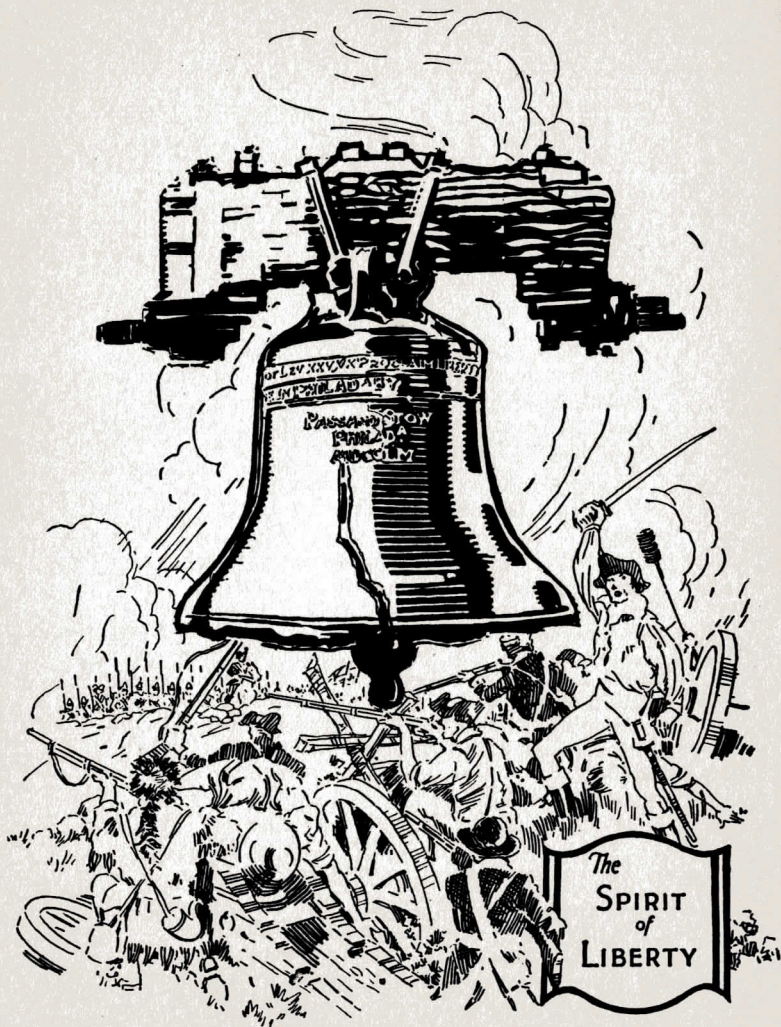
FRAMING
The DECLARATION *of*
INDEPENDENCE

Adopted
July 4, 1776



"It was not the mere matter of separation of the colonies from the motherland, but that sentiment in the *Declaration of Independence* which gave liberty not alone to the people of this country, but hope to all the world, for all future time. It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights would be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance."— ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

John Hancock
MUTUAL
LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
OF BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS



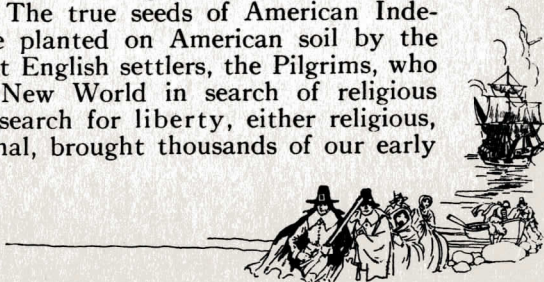
FRAMING *The* DECLARATION of INDEPENDENCE

OF the many great days in the history of our country, none is more universally celebrated, none is more filled with meaning to true patriots, than July fourth, 1776, the birthday of the United States of America.

The events which led up to the adoption of the Declaration of Independence tell the story of the birth of a new nation which was "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

The story of the Declaration of Independence begins far back in our colonial history—long before there was any trouble between the mother country and the colonies—long before the British Parliament began its attempts to tax the colonies. The true seeds of American Independence were planted on American soil by the first permanent English settlers, the Pilgrims, who came to the New World in search of religious liberty. The search for liberty, either religious, civil, or personal, brought thousands of our early

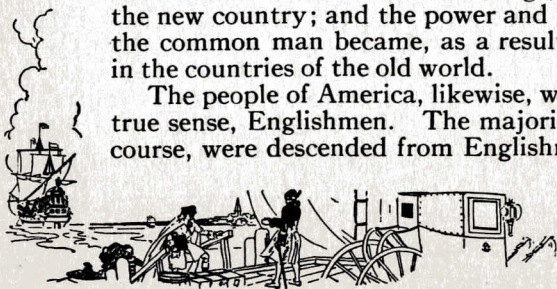
**FOUNDA-
TION of
INDEPEND-
ENCE**



settlers to these shores, and peopled the young America with a race of men to whom liberty was more precious than life. From that day to this, our country has clung to the ideal of liberty, planted by her founders, and it was because the full liberty of the American colonies was threatened by the British Parliament that the colonial leaders, after many useless attempts at conciliation with the mother country, finally declared, on July 4, 1776, that "these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States."

The Declaration of Independence was inevitable. The very nature of the new country destined it to be a country free from external rule. It was a country far from the old European governments, separated by three thousand miles from England. There were no telegraphs, and no cables by which the mother country could keep in touch with her growing young colonies. The slow sailboats took weeks and often months to carry news from one to the other. It was, therefore, natural that the colonies should develop the widest possible powers of self-government. Their forms of government were quite different from that of England. The people, to a great extent, ruled themselves. There were no kings, no nobles in the new country; and the power and importance of the common man became, as a result, greater than in the countries of the old world.

The people of America, likewise, were not, in the true sense, Englishmen. The majority of them, of course, were descended from Englishmen, but they



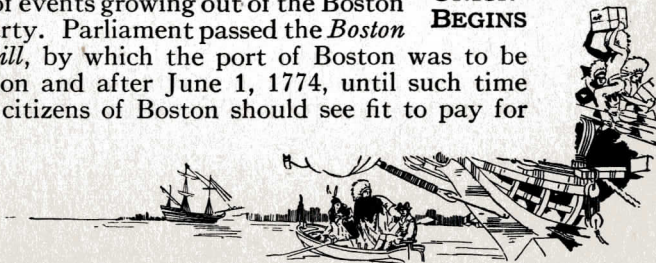
were removed three, four, and sometimes five generations from their English forebears. They were Americans. There were many who were not even of English descent, such as the Dutch of New York and New Jersey, the Germans of Pennsylvania, and the Swedes and Finns of Delaware. Therefore these colonists were not held to the rule of England.

All of these conditions promoted the growth of Independence. But although they existed long before Parliament passed *The Writs of Assistance*, the *Stamp Act*, the *Tea Tax*, or the *Boston Port Bill*, it was not until then that the need for independence began to build up a sentiment in America which grew, slowly at first, until it culminated in the Declaration of Independence.

But independence without first a strong colonial union was impossible. We must remember that the thirteen colonies were not in any sense a single unified country, such as our United States is today. The colonies were almost completely separated from one another. They had no common governor, no common legislative body or congress. It was, therefore, necessary to bring about some kind of union, before the growing desire for independence could take form.

Such a union finally began in 1774, as a result of events growing out of the Boston Tea Party. Parliament passed the *Boston Port Bill*, by which the port of Boston was to be closed on and after June 1, 1774, until such time as the citizens of Boston should see fit to pay for

COLONIAL UNION BEGINS



the tea which had been destroyed on December 16, 1773, at the "Tea Party."

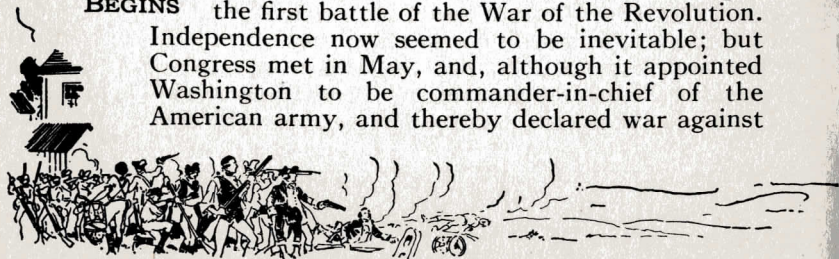
This action on the part of Parliament aroused the whole country. In Virginia, the House of Burgesses passed resolutions of sympathy declaring that Boston was suffering in a common cause. The Royal Governor of Virginia at once dissolved the House of Burgesses as a rebuke for passing such resolutions. The members of the House, now thoroughly aroused over the situation, and wishing to help Boston, met informally at Raleigh Tavern in Williamsburg, Va., on May 27, 1774, and recommended an annual Congress of delegates from all thirteen colonies.

The time was ripe for such a step; and every colony, but Georgia, responded by sending delegates to the First Continental Congress which met in Philadelphia on the fifth day of September, 1774, and adjourned October 26, 1774, having brought the colonies together into the beginning of a union. Although independence was still a long way off, a second Congress was called for May 10, 1775.

**REVOLU-
TIONARY
WAR
BEGINS**

Before the Second Congress met, war had actually begun. At Lexington and Concord, on April 19, 1775, the Minutemen had fought the first battle of the War of the Revolution.

Independence now seemed to be inevitable; but Congress met in May, and, although it appointed Washington to be commander-in-chief of the American army, and thereby declared war against



Great Britain, it was still not ready for independence.

The war continued. The battle of Bunker Hill, June 17, 1775, and the siege of Boston, which began at once thereafter, showed both the British and Americans that peace was a long way off.

It seems strange to us, looking back over the events of the year 1775, that the colonies did not at once see the necessity and the desirability of declaring their independence from Great Britain. Many of the leaders knew that it had to come. Samuel Adams, John Adams, Richard Henry Lee, Patrick Henry, George Washington, and many more favored such a move.

On the other hand, however, a great many colonists believed that independence was neither necessary nor desirable. "Common Sense," a remarkable pamphlet by Thomas Paine, was published in January, 1776, and was such an effective argument for independence that it won thousands to the cause. Public opinion is a slowly moving but a surely moving force, and public opinion was not yet ready for extreme measures. But after a year of war, the people were ready. Congress heard the voice of public opinion and knew that the time had come to act.

On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia, a man who for some time had been an advocate of colonial independence, arose in

**The LEE
RESOLU-
TION**

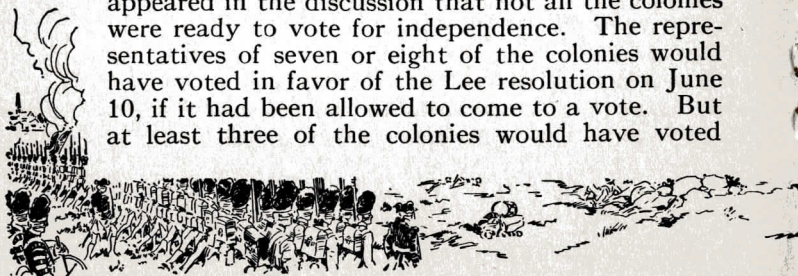


Congress and offered three resolutions, of which the first declared: "That these United Colonies are and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be totally dissolved."

In order that the members might have time to think over this very important resolution, it was laid on the table until the following day, when Congress resolved: "That the resolution respecting Independency be referred to a committee of the whole," and the discussion began.

What was said we do not know, as no complete report was made of the speeches in the Continental Congress. But after two days of discussion, the committee of the whole, of which Benjamin Harrison was chairman, voted as follows: "Resolved that the consideration of the first resolution be postponed to Monday, the first day of July next; and in the meanwhile, that no time be lost in case the Congress agree thereto, that a committee be appointed to prepare a declaration to the effect of the said resolution."

The reason for delaying the final vote on the resolution until after the first of July was that it appeared in the discussion that not all the colonies were ready to vote for independence. The representatives of seven or eight of the colonies would have voted in favor of the Lee resolution on June 10, if it had been allowed to come to a vote. But at least three of the colonies would have voted



against it, and one or two others were doubtful. By delaying the vote the members who favored immediate independence hoped to bring the doubtful members into line and thus secure unanimous action in favor of American independence. It was a wise move, and the final result justified the delay.

The committee to draw up the Declaration of Independence was chosen on June 11. It consisted of the chairman, Thomas Jefferson, and four other members—John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston. **WRITING the DECLARATION of INDEPENDENCE**

As chairman, Thomas Jefferson was entrusted with the important work of writing the document which was to become the birth certificate of a new nation. No happier choice could have been made for the authorship of the immortal document. Jefferson, although only thirty-three years of age, had been for some years a leader of the colonial cause in Virginia. He was an excellent lawyer and a thorough student of government. He had already written a document, two years earlier, in which he had set forth the rights of the colonies in a set of instructions to the Virginia delegates to the First Continental Congress.

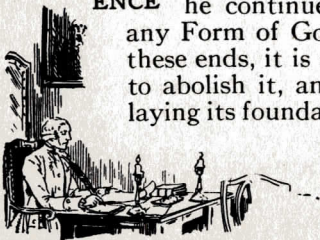
Jefferson began work at once on the Declaration. The location of the house in which he wrote the document has been definitely established. It was on the south side of Market Street, Philadelphia, between Seventh and Eighth Streets. The house, unfortunately, is no longer standing, but the desk



upon which he wrote has been preserved and is today among the treasured possessions of the Department of State at Washington.

Never in the whole range of political writing has the fundamental basis of government been so clearly and so powerfully stated as in Jefferson's Declaration. The ideas were not new—they could not have been new—since Jefferson attempted to state what the colonists all believed and were fighting for; but Jefferson possessed the ability of combining words and phrases that cling to the memory, and that do not grow stale by continuous repetition. To this day such phrases as "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness," are as true and as fresh as the day Jefferson penned them.

The **MEANING** **of the** **DECLARATION** **of** **INDEPENDENCE** **The argument** of the Declaration is likewise clear and convincing. Jefferson first outlined the basis of true popular government: "Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." From this statement he continued by declaring "That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organiz-



ing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

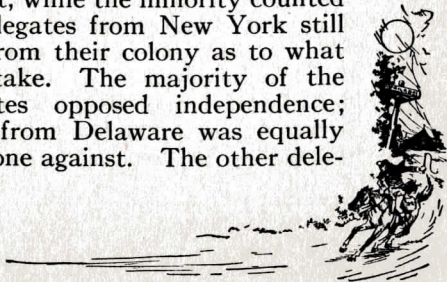
After a word of caution against haste in destroying established governments for small or transient causes, he went on to enumerate the long list of grievances which the colonists had suffered at the hands of the present government, and finally declared that because the present government had broken all the laws of justice and consideration, "These United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be free and independent States."

Having finished the document, Jefferson sent it to the other members of the committee. Franklin and John Adams made a few minor changes, but on the whole the document was sent to the Congress almost exactly as it came from Jefferson's desk.

On June 28, 1776, Jefferson delivered the Declaration to the Congress, where it was read and laid on the table to await the vote on Lee's resolution before coming up for consideration.

Unanimous consent on the Lee resolution was still very doubtful when July first came and the resolution was brought up for final action. Each colony had one vote, the majority of the delegates casting it, while the minority counted for nothing. The delegates from New York still had no instructions from their colony as to what action they should take. The majority of the Pennsylvania delegates opposed independence; while the delegation from Delaware was equally divided, one for, and one against. The other dele-

**INDEPEND-
ENCE
DECIDED**

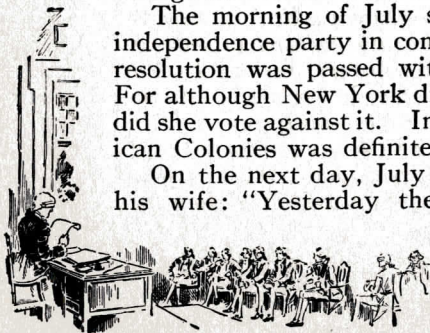


gate from Delaware, Caesar Rodney, was at home, eighty miles from Philadelphia. He was known to favor independence, so an express rider was sent, post-haste, to bring him to the Congress in time to cast the deciding vote for his colony. The members from South Carolina had no instructions as to how they should vote on the measure, but they had been instructed to vote with the other colonies for such measures as would promote the best interests of their colony and of the continent.

The friends of independence secured another day's delay so that they might bring the doubtful members to the point of an affirmative vote. The night of July first must have been a busy one. Caesar Rodney, having received the message of the express rider, mounted his horse and rode all night. The South Carolina delegation was at last persuaded that their instructions were broad enough to permit them to vote for independence; and two of the Pennsylvania delegates, who opposed independence, were persuaded to stay away from the session of July 2, while the third was convinced that he should change his vote.

The morning of July second dawned with the independence party in complete control. The Lee resolution was passed without a dissenting vote! For although New York did not vote for it, neither did she vote against it. Independence of the American Colonies was definitely decided!

On the next day, July 3, John Adams wrote to his wife: "Yesterday the greatest question was



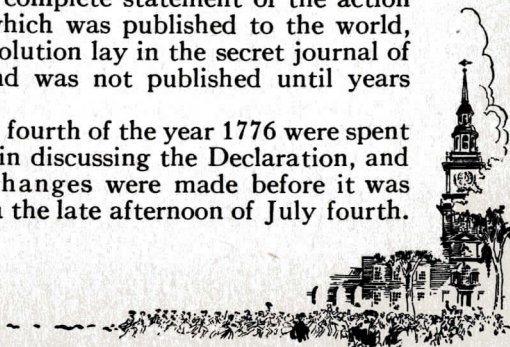
decided which ever was debated in America; and a greater, perhaps, never was nor will be decided among men. A resolution was passed without one dissenting colony; 'that these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be, Free and Independent States.' You will see in a few days a declaration setting forth the causes which have impelled us to this mighty revolution." And in another letter, on the evening of the same day:

"The second day of July, 1776, will be the most memorable epoch in the history of America . . . It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward forevermore!"

Posterity has seen fit to celebrate not July second, the day on which the question of independence was decided, but July fourth, the day on which the Declaration of Independence was adopted; for the Declaration was the full and complete statement of the action of the colonies which was published to the world, while the Lee resolution lay in the secret journal of the Congress, and was not published until years later.

July third and fourth of the year 1776 were spent by the Congress in discussing the Declaration, and several small changes were made before it was finally adopted in the late afternoon of July fourth.

**The DEC-
LARATION
of INDE-
PENDENCE
ADOPTED**



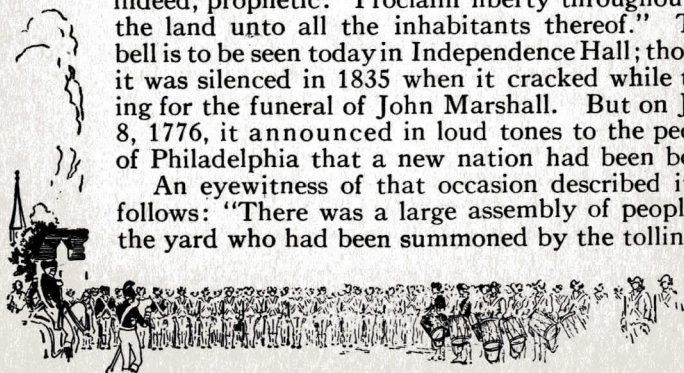
The members did not sign the Declaration at once. In fact the only ones to sign the document on July fourth were the President of the Congress, John Hancock, who signed it "for and in behalf of the Congress," and the Secretary of the Congress, Charles Thomson.

**PUBLIC
ANNOUNCE-
MENT
of the
DECLARA-
TION of
INDEPEND-
ENCE**

Several copies of the Declaration of Independence were printed and sent out on July 5 to the governors of the several colonies and to the generals of the army; but it was not until July 8 that the first public reading of the Declaration took place, in the old State House yard (Independence Square) in Philadelphia.

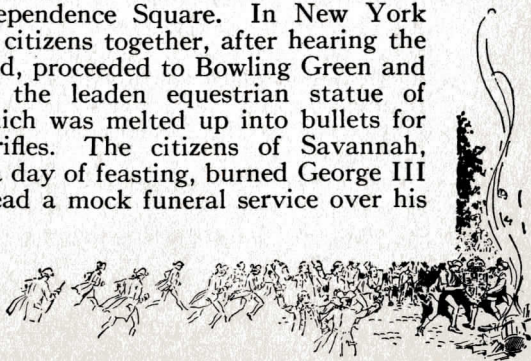
By order of Congress, the bell in the old State House, where Congress was in session, was rung to call together the citizens of Philadelphia. This bell, now known as the "Liberty Bell," had been cast, in 1752, in London, and recast twice by Pass and Stow in Philadelphia and finally, in 1753, again hung in the old State House, now known as "Independence Hall." The inscription on the bell was, indeed, prophetic: "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof." This bell is to be seen today in Independence Hall; though it was silenced in 1835 when it cracked while tolling for the funeral of John Marshall. But on July 8, 1776, it announced in loud tones to the people of Philadelphia that a new nation had been born!

An eyewitness of that occasion described it as follows: "There was a large assembly of people in the yard who had been summoned by the tolling of



the Liberty Bell, as there had been many times before on the occasion of some public event. Passing through the assembled crowd, the procession of officials, who had charge of proclaiming this State paper to the people, reached the platform, at which time the Liberty Bell ceased ringing. Colonel John Nixon, to whom the high sheriff of Philadelphia had delegated the reading, stood up in the silence. He was a strong-voiced and open-featured man. He began reading with the words 'In Congress, July 4, 1776, a Declaration of the Representatives of the United States of America,' and read through the important document. And it was accepted with general applause and heartfelt satisfaction."

Everywhere the public reading of the Declaration of Independence was received with the same burst of enthusiasm. "It was read in courts and council halls, on public squares and village greens, from pulpits and platforms. It was received with processions, banquets, and salvos of cannon. In Philadelphia the people tore down the late king's arms from the State House and burned them in a bonfire in Independence Square. In New York the troops and citizens together, after hearing the Declaration read, proceeded to Bowling Green and dragged down the leaden equestrian statue of George III, which was melted up into bullets for the patriots' rifles. The citizens of Savannah, Georgia, after a day of feasting, burned George III in effigy and read a mock funeral service over his grave."



**The
SIGNING
of the
DECLARA-
TION of
INDEPEND-
ENCE**

Congress, on July 19, ordered the Declaration to "be fairly engrossed on parchment." And this copy is the one which was finally signed by the members on August 2, 1776.

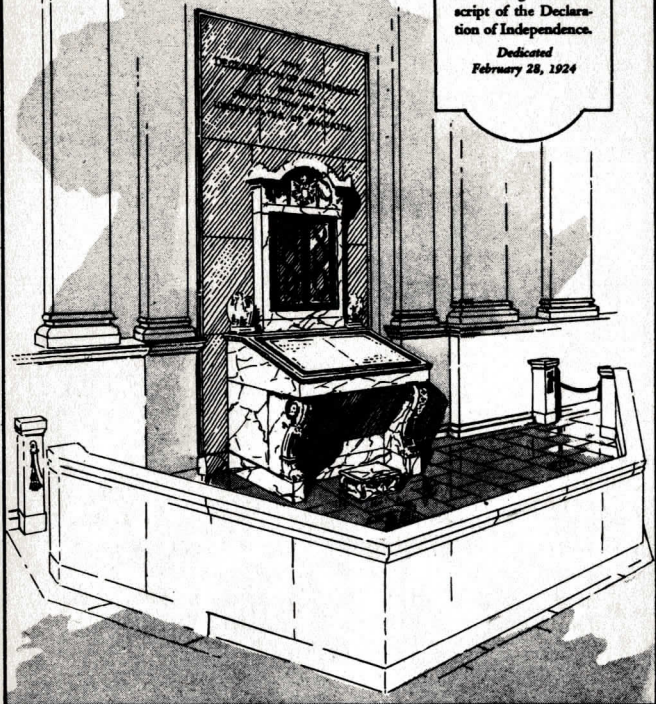
When John Hancock, as President of the Congress, affixed his bold signature to the immortal document, "where all nations should behold it and all time should not efface it," he is reported to have said, upon laying down his pen, "I write so that George the Third may read without his spectacles." The other members then signed the Declaration. In all there were fifty-six signers; but it is very likely that only fifty signed it on August 2. The other six signed at various times, even as late as 1781, when Thomas McKean, who had voted for the Declaration on July 4 and had left Philadelphia almost at once to join the army, was allowed to sign.

The original of this great state paper is carefully preserved to this day in Washington. And after more than a century and a half, it exists not only in letter but also in spirit; for our country, whose birth it announced, still stands secure upon the foundation of liberty, equality, and justice — the great cornerstones of American Independence — firmly set in place on July fourth, seventeen hundred and seventy-six, when the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of American Independence.



The Shrine at the
Library of Congress
in Washington, D. C.
for the original manu-
script of the Declara-
tion of Independence.

*Dedicated
February 28, 1924*



The original of the Constitution
of the United States
is also here.

Visitors to the Library may see
these precious documents
at any time.

Presented by

John Hancock
MUTUAL
LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
OF BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS



Framing the DECLARATION of
INDEPENDENCE